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# Millbach History and Lore

PAPER READ BEFORE THE

Lebanon County Historical Society

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BY

JOHN M. KRALL

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JOHN M. KRALL

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# Millbach History and Lore

By JOHN M. KRALL

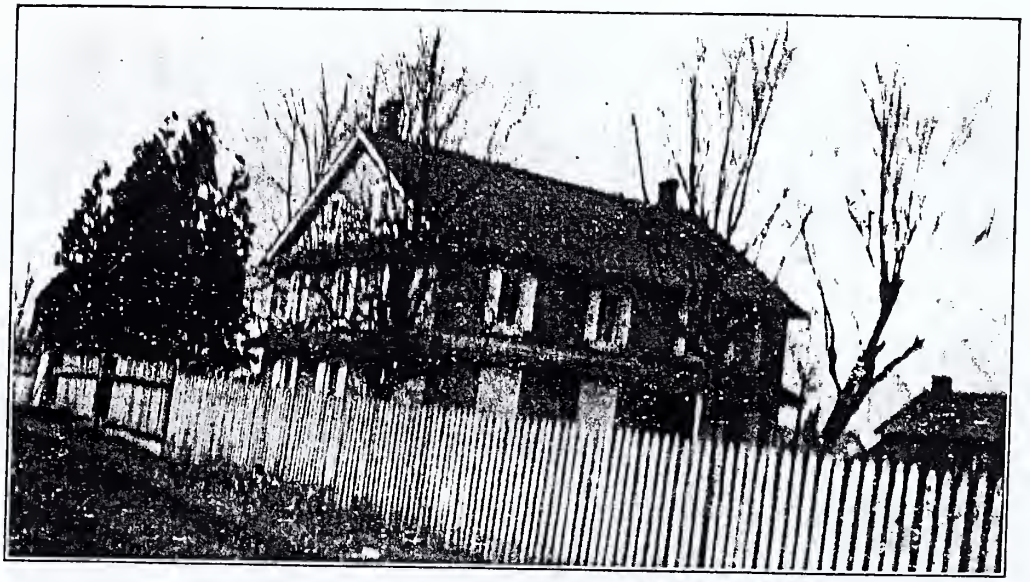
John, Thomas and Richard Penn, Esqs., True and Absolute Proprietaries and Governors in chief, of the province of Pennsylvania, and the counties of New Castle, Kent and Sussex, on the Delaware. To all unto whom these presents shall come send greeting, whereas in and by indentures of lease and release, bearing date respectively, the third and fourth days of April, in the year of our Lord 1695. Our late Father William Penn, Esq., 'since deceased' did grant and release unto Henry Gouldney, then of the City of London, "since also deceased," the quantity of 1500 acres of land within our said province, to hold to him his heirs and assigns forever until the yearly quit rent therein, mentioned and reserved, and whereas, by our special order and direction in writing dated in London, the 22nd day of December 1729, the said quantity of 1500 acres of land was on the 28th day of October, A. D., 1730 surveyed in three several tracts within the County of Lancaster, and afterwards we granted three distinct warrants under our lesser seal bearing date 22nd day of March A. D., 1733 requiring our surveyor general to accept and receive the surveys made of the land aforesaid, and to make return thereof into our secretaries' office in order for confirmation.' And, whereas, in and by sundry devises Discounts or grants from and under the said Henry Gouldney, and his or her devisees duly made and executed the right of and the aforesaid 1500 acres of land and premises became legally vested in "Jane Penn" of the borough of Chester in our said province. And, whereas, one of the aforesaid tracts of 900 acres of land situate in Heidelberg Township in the County of Lancaster, being the lease and release of the 28 and 29th days of December, A. D., 1737 Bargained and sold and conveyed by the said Jane Penn unto George

Miller, and others who are settled thereon, they requested our warrant to resurvey and divide the said tract of land according to the quantities by them respectively purchased. Whereupon, we granted the same, under the Seal of our land office bearing date the 10th of July requiring our Surveyor General to resurvey and divide the tract of 900 acres situate in Heidelberg Township and to make separate returns thereof into our Secretaries' office, in order for confirmation. And the same being accordingly resurveyed and divided and duly returned as in and by our warrant aforesaid, was required the part or dividend thereof belonging to the said George Miller, bounded by lands of Christopher Stump, Leonard Feaks, and Andrew Ellicks, allowance of six acres for Roads and Highways, at the request of George Miller, we grant him a confirmation of the said 144 acres of land according to the resurvey and division. Know ye therefore, that in consideration of the premises and of the yearly Quit Rent thereinafter mentioned and reserved, We have given, granted, released and confirmd and by these presents for us our heirs and successors do give, grant, release and confirm unto the said George Miller and his heirs the said 144 acres with all Mines, Minerals, Quarries, Meadows, Marshes, Savannahs, Swamps, Cripples, Woods, Underwoods, Timber and Trees, Ways, Waters, Water Courses, Liberties, Profits, Commodities, Advantages, Hereditaments and appurtenances whatsoever to the said 144 acres belonging or in any wise appertaining and lying within bounds and limits aforesaid. Three full and clear fifth parts of all Royal Mines free from all deductions and revisals for digging and refining and also one fifth part of all other mines delivered at the pits mouth only excepted and reserved. And also free leave and right and liberty to and for the said George Miller his heirs and assigns to Hawk, Hunt, Fish and Fowl in and upon the hereby granted land and premises or upon any part thereof to Have and to hold the said 144 acres and premises hereby granted, except before excepted with their appurtenances unto the said George Miller, his heirs and assigns to the only use and behoof of the said George Miller,

his heirs and assigns forever to be holder of us, our heirs and successors, proprietaries of Pennsylvania as of our Manor of Conestoga in the County of Lancaster, aforesaid, in free and common soccage by fealty only in lieu of all other services. Yielding and paying therefore yearly to us our heirs and successors at the town of Lancaster, at or upon the First Day of March in every year from the First Day of March last part, One English Silver "Shilling" for the said 144 acres of land, or value thereof in coin-current according as the exchange shall then be between our said province and the City of London to such person or persons as shall from time to time be appointed to receive the same. And in case of nonpayment thereof within 90 days next after the same shall become due, that then it shall and may be lawful for us our heirs and successors, our and their Receiver or Receivers, into and upon the hereby granted land and promises to Reenter and the same to hold and possess, until the said Quit Rent and all arrears thereof together with the charges accruing by means of such non payment be fully paid, and discharged. In witness thereof, the said Thomas Penn by virtue of the powers and authority granted to him by the said John and Richard Penn, and of his own right hath caused the Great Seal of the said province to be hereinto affixed at Philadelphia this 30th day of July in the year of our Lord 1741 the 15th year of the reign of King George, the Second, over Great Britian, and the 27th year of our Government.

JOHN PENN, (Seal.)

This Preface seems to be quite appropriate, for the simple reason that very few individuals of our day and generation have any knowledge of the verbiage of the original deeds issued by William Penn and his sons. The deed granted to George Miller is especially intresting beause the original grant of 1500 acres (of which his 144 acres was an important part) was made to Henry Gouldney, a citizen of the City of London, through the proper London officials as early as A. D. 1695.



THE OLD BECKER HOMESTEAD

The Millcreek, Millbach or Muelbach, flowing through the most fertile section of the far famed Lebanon Valley, derives it source from a copious spring located on a farm now owned by John Hoffman a maternal descendant of one of the pioneers of the Muehlbach Vale. This farmer's part of Heidelberg Township lies close to the boundary of Millcreek township. All of Millcreek Township prior to 1856 was included in Heidelberg Township. Heidelberg Township at that time extended from Elizabethtown in Lancaster Co., to the Berks County line. The voters of what is now Millcreek Township came from the Texter table land farm and from the boundary of Berks County to Schaefferstown, a distance of eight and nine miles, to place their ballots.

The Hoffman Farm was originally owned by one of the Becker brothers, who settled in adjoining tracts of various acreage from 120 to 200 acres. The Becker estate consisted originally of the greater part of the 1500 acre tract deeded to Jane Feun, of Chester county, by John Penn and his brothers, Miss Feun leased it to parties resident here, relatives of whom would visit it during the Summer and fish along the creek that flowed through the plantation. There are still legal papers in the hands of the Becker family showing the transfer of the property to the Becker family. When the Feuns found it did not pay them, then the plantation was cut into smaller farms and the different farm houses built thereon. The George Royer farm bounds the Hoffman farm on the East side, also a Becker tract, through which the Muehlbach flows. The successive owners of the Royer farm were Becker, Gockley, Royer.

The farm owned by Henry Bennetch was also a Becker farm, also the farm owned by Thomas Becker, who is a direct descendent of the original Becker family. The Muehlbach flows through the four farms to the Illig farm, a part of the 144 acre tract bought by George Miller through which the Muehlbach, flows reaches the artificial channel through which it rushes and then leads to the beautiful old Mill, the attractiveness of which consists in the well preserved condition

THE OLD MUEHLBACK MILL

of the structure after having stood the ravages of almost two centuries, showing the people of the present day and generation the excellent system of architecture, almost imperishable. Homestead and mill are connectedly built of limestone with sand stone trimmings several feet thick and the old Dutch roof with high gables. The threshold of the mill is deeply worn, evidencing the numerous patrons, including the first settlers, and their successors up to the present day.

After bounding over the 18 foot water wheel the Muehlbach continues its course through the farms of the Moore's, the Holstein's, the Meisers', the Bennteh's, the Zeller's where it unites with the Cherington trout stream, from thence to the old Missemer Mill the burrs of which it has kept in motion for many years, from thence into the Tulpehocken Creek, which flows through the part of Lebanon Valley which was made famous by Conrad Weiser, one of the most prominent characters during the colonial days. The tract of 144 acres acquired by George Miller was divided into two parts owned in the last century by two brothers, Leonard and Jonathan Illig. After their decease Elias Illig owned the Mill property and about 35 acres of land, and Capt. J. Batdorf the other, the larger part.

The artificial channel through which the Muehlbach flows is lined on both sides by a large variety of beautiful trees, an ideal place more thoroughly appreciated by individuals of a romantic turn of mind than those who are more prosiac. The Moore families are also descendants of the earliest settlers, the Holsteins, the Stumps, the Meisers, the Kalbachs, the Zimmermans, the Leibigs, the Moyers. All there are direct descendants of the original purchasers of the different farms, now representing the sixth and seventh generations. Some of these farms still have the old homestead buildings, which hold a charm no modern building can present. The old Moore homestead is a typical pioneer mansion of first class order, so substantially built that it will survive some of the most elaborate and expensive structures which are now being erected.

One of the pecularities of the Moore families is that quite a large proportion of them have been celibates. Three generations ago the Moore family consisted of one bachelor, and three spinster sisters, As was customary in those days. shoes and sockings were seldom worn during the Summer month, The leading laborer on the farm, a widower, fell in love with one of the spinster sisters, and in order to discover whether she might or would reciprocate the glorious sentimental affection, he, while the family and servants and laborers were seated at the dinner table, placed his barefoot on her barefoot, knowing that if she did not resent the unusually familiarily by instantly withdrawing her foot his advances would be agreeable. Shortly after the crude experiment was made, the couple were united in wedlock and everafter lived happily together, proving that both had met their true affinities and today their descendants are important residents in the vicinity.

On the premises of one of the oldest homestead farms in the Valley some years prior to the Revolutionary War there was a tragical occurrence. Two Indians came on the premises and having assumed a hostile and menacing attitude, several sons of the household endeavored to pacify them by offering them their most liberal hospitality and finally persuade them to accept food and the Indians each accepted a large tankard of hard cider. After having repeated the draught a number of times the Indians became stupified by the beverage, the paleface settlers stabbed their red skinned guests to the heart through the armpits with knitting needles. They hid the corpses, and at opportune times buried them in a secret place. The Indian tribe of which the slaughtered Indians were members, never discovered what had become of their comrades.

The Muhlbach flows through such a beautiful dale that the aborigines, the primeval owners, came from the South eastern part of the Grand State, meandered along this beautiful stream, spearing fish, of which there was an abundance in those days and hunting the different game then to be found

in plentitude along the foot of the well clad South Mountain This is evidenced by the large number of Indian relics, which have been found from time to time through the different meadows and in the freshly ploughed and harrowed fields. The relics consist of all varieties of arrowheads, many sizes for large and small game, axes, tomahawks, pipes, beads and numerous kind for ornaments.

The first settlers of the various sections of Pennsylvania were generally of a religious turn of mind. Their first efforts after their homes were built and made ordinarily comfortable, were to select and establish a place of worship either Reformed or Lutheran i. e., in German settlements, or both—frequently used the same edifice, where the various families met and heard the sermons of the pioneer circuit preacher who led them to the fount from which all blessings flow shared their sorrows and tribulations, christened their infants, performed the ceremonies of marriage, distributed the bread and wine for their spiritual nourishment, buried their dead and oftimes shared their toils by taking an active part. therein.

These early settlers had the pleasure of meeting each other at the church on monthly, semi-monthly or weekly occasions, their homes being widely saparated throughout the Valley. These people were faithful, brave, frugal, happy living their lives in a pure and virtuous manner, interested in each other's welfare, just as though they were all brothers and sisters. There were no grafters in those day.

Close to the junction of the Millbach and Cherington Streams on the bank of the Millbach we find the Zeller Indian fort. We all know what trials and perils our fore father's experienced through the long years of Indian war fare, when they were compelled to resort to the erection of forts, to the construction of all kinds of defences, such as vaulted celllars, block houses, high stockades around their gardens to keep the red intruders out.

The Zeller fort is a well sized and stoutly built structure,

one and one-half stories high, built with a spacious cellar, half under ground, from which flows a strong and beautiful stream of clear water, having its rise here in a perennial spring. It was erected by Heinrich Zeller in 1745, as is shown engraved on a head stone within the wall. It is kept in good repair and now used mostly for a farmers' storage house. Previous to the present generation it had long been occupied as a weavers' shop. About fifty feet away the place is pointed out when Heinrich Zeller in 1723, built the first house, of logs, which it is claimed was the first meeting place of the early Scoharie settlers for worship and defence and mutual conference. This house was displaced in 1745 by the stone fort. The name of Henry Zeller frequently occurs in the Colonial Records of that day, principally in connection with correspondence concerning the title to his lands. It seems there was considerable difficulty in gaining a good title, as we find it was in 1743, 20 years after having settled that he obtained legal papers. The necessity for building a house in the form of a fort was self evident. Frequently the Indian war whoop was heard and the tomahawk and scalping knife were flourished by these savage foes.

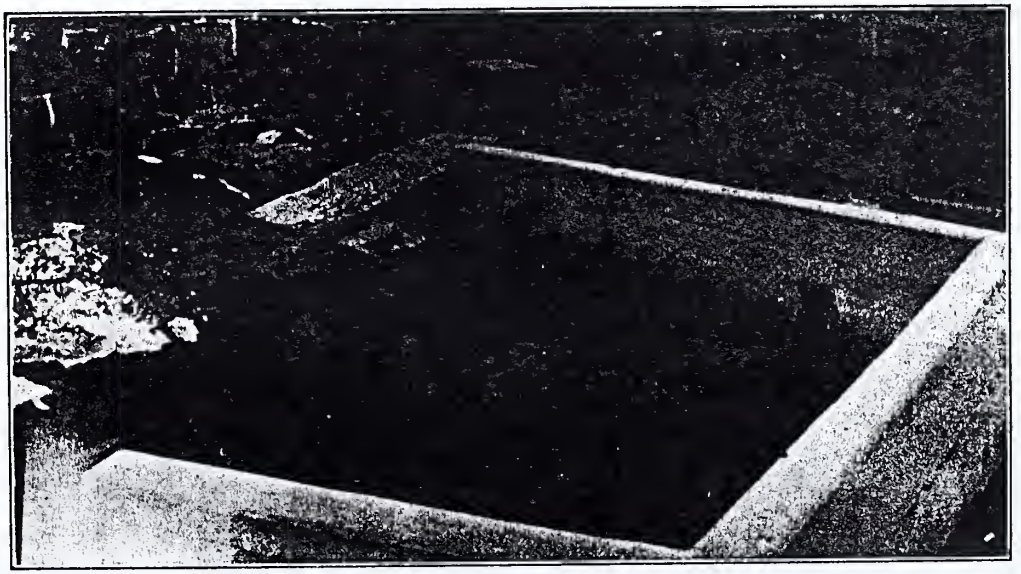
Many an unwary white traveler or tiller of soil was dispatched and frequently whole families were scalped and butchered. These houses of refuge were therefore erected in different parts of the Settlement to afford the settlers of each locality a safe rendezous, whither the community could flee for safety at the first signal of peril.

Thus we find quite a number of buildings still standing throughout our valley, that were used for this purpose. This one was among the first to be erected and most centrally situated for the earliest settlemen. The building itself is a curiosity, its walls are two feet thick and laid up with many large and well dressed stones, its door posts are about 5½ feet high and the linted, fully 3 feet long, are single sand stones, with some attempts at carved ornamentation upon them. The head stone over the door, and

the slab bearing name and date have elaborate figures and lines carved upon them. The door is double or in two parts, upper and lower, resembling some stable doors and consists of double inch boards pegged together with wooden pins. An iron catch or staple on the inside soldered with lead into the stone door post catches the heavy iron latch that closes the door. All the windows were originally but small square port holes in the wall. Three of these have since been enlarged for the accommodation of a cloth weaver, who plied his craft here several generations ago. The rest remains intact, so does the building throughout, its main floor over the cellar is arched below and leveled with stone and earth. A large and quaint Queen Anne fire place, 12ft., wide graces the kitchen part of the house. In the wall forming the chimney is a mark which tradition says was made by a cannon ball shot through one of the port holes during the Colonial struggles with the French and Indians.

It is an historical fact that in 1755 these hostile forces crossed the Susquehanna from the West, and invaded this Eastern territory. It was at this time when Col. Conrad Weiser wrote his rousing letters to the Proprietary Quaker government at Philadelhia urging speedy efforts in defence of its citizens. At the same time he himself summoned together the farmers of this Community, and at this very house organized a company of over three hundred men, who after summoning Pastor Kurtz to address them and offer a prayer in their behalf, marched up the valley towards the Susquehanna with their weapons of pitch forks and flint lock muskets to repel the foe.

An interesting story is told in what seems reliable traditionary evidence of how the heroic wife of Heinrich Zeller, Christine "by name", one day while alone in the house, decapitated with a broadax three prowling and plundering Indians at the cellar loop hole. This hole is on the side through which the water flows out from the Spring within. Christine seeing the Indians stealthily approaching this spot,



Back of this spring stood the First Albrecht Meeting House

sneaking up the streamlet, she quickly descended the cellar steps from within and stationed herself alongside the opening with broadax upraised, presently the head of the first Indian protruded through the hole, when down came the weapon with a heavy blow. It had its desired effect. Promptly dragging the body through the hole, she, though in a disguised Indian voice, gave notice for the other two to follow as all was right within. Presently the second victim followed whom she dispatched in the same bloody manner, likewise the third, glorying on the return of her husband at night over her conquest of the treacherous red men.

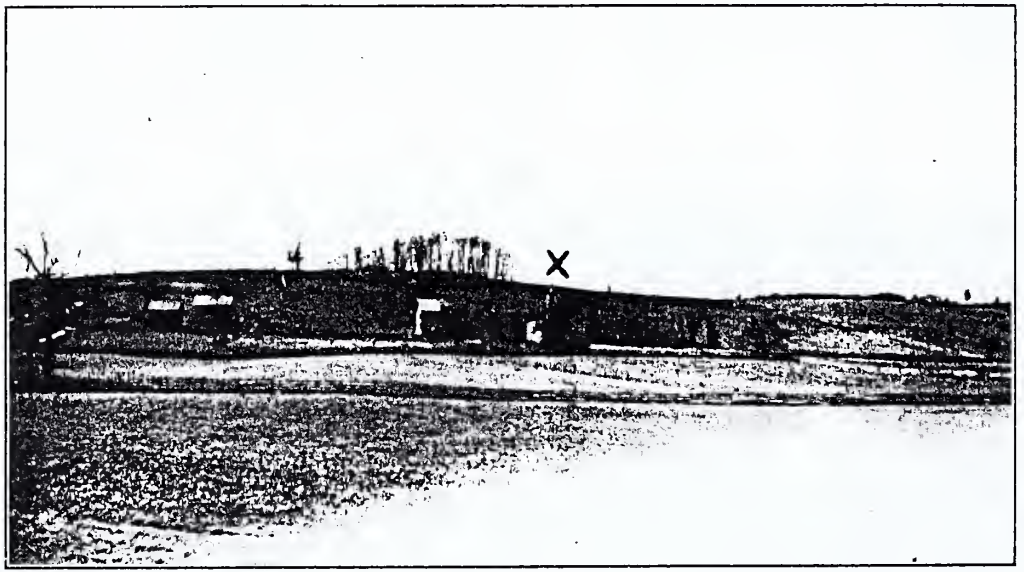
The romantic Muehlbach is noted for a singular peculiarity, in that this vale may be called the cradle of several of the peculiar religious sects for which the German counties of Pennsylvania have become noted. It was here within sight of the old Ehig mill where the Rev. Jacob Albrecht was awakened, and founded the Evangelical Association, which as a religious denomination had a half decade ago completed its first century of a most remarkable and checkered life. It has spread over the whole country. Two decades go it was divided thus forming two parties known respectively as the Dubsites and Esherites. Most of the church buildings were claimed by the Esherites who were sustained by the different courts, the buildings after the decisions of the courts either were sold or retained and occupied by the Esherites, who claimed that they were the original Evangelical denomination as founded. The Dubbsites established themselves as the United Evangelical Association, and have flourished and prospered wonderfully. They have erected magnificent churches throughout the entire country and have made great strides in this direction.

Within a short distance from the source of the Muehlbach may be seen the old and first Albrecht church, now endowed as a memorial, the founders grave, and the house where the first conference was held. Half a decade ago the Evangelical Association celebrated the Centennial of the founding of their denomination in the old and first church. It

is a remarkable fact or coincidence that another Spring, feeding this same creek farther down the current, marks the place where Elder Peter Becker, of the Dunker persuasion, immersed Conrad Beissel, the rather illustrious founder of the Seventh Day Baptist sect, which Spring is known in the denominational history of this church as the "Dunker Spring." Near where Illig's mill now stands tradition points as the spot, where Conrad Beissel, "the leading spirit of the Ephrata or Rosicrucian mystics" once reared, his anchorite hut here in the romantic solitude composed a number of his hymns and Theosophic Epistles.

From this vicinity he withdrew and gravitated to the banks of Cocalico, where he established a community known as the Seventh Day Baptists, for whom were erected numerous large and tall buildings, having high gables, and concrete garret floors, so as to make the top floors incombustible. These buildings served as a convent or monastery for the Community Sisters and Brethren. Here also was established the first printing press in that part of the State, wherein were printed the headlines of the old parchment deeds with their fine decorations. These buildings were constructed by hand, no horses being used to bring in the lumber. This Seventh Day Baptist community was for years, one of the foremost in the colonies of North America.

The Hamlet called Millcreek Centre, (located with several hundred yards of the old Muehlbach Mill) claims to have witnessed the first settlement in these parts. Here the records show a Reformed church to have been erected. This was the first church in all the Muehlbach Valley. It was a log Meeting House, followed by a frame church which in 1790 gave place to the present stone structure, situated on a slight elevation of ground. It became a Union church in 1855. Some years ago, by the expenditures of several thousand dollars, it was changed to a beautiful modern church building in its exterior appearance and interior style and arrangement. A marble slab over the entrance door gives the above named facts epitomized. Until recently a very




Landscape view, and the Old Albrecht Church, indicated by (X)

old Bible (German) was here used in the services The church has generally been served by the Tulpehocken pastors on the Lutheran side and the Schaefferstown pastors on the Reformed side.

But while this is the only church in this hamlet, it was not the first religious worship which its erection witnessed here. It is claimed that fully two decades earlier, or before this time, Conrad Beissel and a few associate German Baptists or Dunkers arrived from Germany and settled here, doubtless conducting worships in the house this leader is said to have erected. It is evident that they here found water enough to accommodate them in their immersion practices. As no history of the erection of a Dunker Meeting House or of a separate local congregation is extant it is probable that this nucleus formed a part of the Conestoga First day Dunkers. It was not long, however, before Mr. Beissel fell out with his Brethren on a number of points of doctrine, principally that concerning the Sabbath observation, he claiming the Seventh day as the proper one to be kept. He published a tract as early as 1720 fully setting forth his views, and withdrew from fellowship with his brethren He had quite a following, and thus was born the Seventh Day Baptist sect or Society which, led by their zealous leader removed to Ephrata, Lancaster Co., where they promulgated their mystic views, and made for themselves a quaint but somewhat conspicuous history among the denominations of our country.

In education and publication this new center was leading the German population of this section of the State for half a century.

Here in this Muehlbach valley many of the first settlers of the Lebanon Valley planted their homes They came from various sections of Germany and by different directions reached here about the same time, landing either at Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York or from Southern N. Y. State, where they had settled, acquired farms, and erected buildings. When they discovered that their titles were not valid

they abandoned their homes, built rafts and floated down the Susquehanna, passing the sites of great towns and cities then undreamed of. After reaching the junction of the West and North Branches of the Susquehanna, they floated further down past the junction of the Juniata and Susquehanna to the mouth of the Swatara at Middletown, thence by that stream inland to various sections in the Bethel region and the Lebanon Valley.

Their descendants are settled all over this land of milk and honey and can vouch for their different pedigrees. We know that thousands and tens of thousands of American citizens who are scattered to all parts of the United States owe their existence through birth to this most beautiful section. We doubt whether there is any other section to be found like the valley along the South Mountain where almost invariably the farms are owned by the descendants of the original settlers. The names are all there. The reputation and character is there, all first class citizens, Godfearing, honest and true, fostering the true principles imparted to them by their true ancestors.

The South Mountain, bounding one half of the Muehlbach, was the headquarters of a pair of practical highwaymen, burglars and thieves, Sinclair and Wilson, for whom every citizen had a wholesome dread. They finally drifted to distant towns. Wilson was executed, in the vicinity of Pittsburg and Sinclair met his fate on the gallows in Luzerne county. They both confessed that they had buried a pot of gold and silver along the Saglech creek near the Baron Stiegel dam, which was constructed by Stiegel to force the creek through a channel to the Elizabeth Furnace to increase the water power. The pot has not yet been found. In order to enjoy a thorough view of the Millbach Valley it is necessary to ascend the South Mountain through the "Kluft" roadway, there your eyes will be edified by one of the most enchanting scenes on this continent.

The Muehlbach stream can be seen meandering through

the valley from the southwestern boundary to the southeastern extremity. The length of the valley stretches at least 6 miles. This little vale is a poem for natural beauty and improved cultivation. It deserves to be immortalized in song and history. To the eyes of all lovers of Nature it presents itself as a huge cradle, fashioned thus by nature and employed by Providence in which to rock the infant life (in this continent) of no less than half a dozen of our Protestant religious denominations. The valley stretches in a westerly or south westerly course from Newmanstown in the direction towards Schaefferstown. On the left the towering South Mountain hems us in, which being so close at hand, clearly shows its very rocky rib in the afternoon sun, like some illfed petrified mastodon. It also gives a sense of warmth and protection to the dwellings that cosily nestle in the rich vale at its feet, which helps the imagination in seeing the cradlelikeness of this territory.

By a slight pressure upon either barrier, and a little stretch of the imagination, one can see this cradle rock. It is covered during most of the year with one of Dame Nature's homespun spreads of emerald true and reminds one of the famous Tyrol Valleys. All readers of this description, after having had a thorough view of this Canaan-like valley, will acknowledge the veracity of the writer.

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